

Mirrors

Everyone,

While we're on the subject of mirrors ... this is one thing you can practice during the off-season, while driving on the highway: **practice your mirror habits!** A few tips:

-- At all times, you should know what cars are behind you and alongside, how close, without even looking. In other words, you should be checking your mirrors frequently enough that you constantly have a "**mental picture**" of all the cars around you.

-- My high-school Driver Ed instructor used to do this drill: while the student was driving, the Instructor would suddenly cover the rear-view mirror and ask "what's behind you? what kind of car, how close?" If you couldn't answer, you failed the test. This was his way of teaching a student to always maintain that "mental image" of cars around him.

-- Most people, including race drivers, adjust their mirrors incorrectly. **The outside mirrors should be adjusted OUTWARD**, to see cars that are alongside your car -- not BACKWARD to see cars behind you.

-- **Try this test:** carefully "track" another car as it is passing you on the highway ... you should first see it in your rear-view mirror, then it should pass into your left-side mirror, then from your left-side mirror into your peripheral vision -- WITHOUT EVER TURNING YOUR HEAD. If you are turning your head to look for cars in the lane beside you, your mirrors are set wrong. There should be very little "overlap" between what you see in the rear-view mirror, and what you see in the side mirrors. When the car's rear fender leaves your rear-view mirror, it's front fender should be just starting to appear in your side mirror.

-- With modern street cars, if the mirrors are adjusted properly, there will be NO blind spots behind you are experiencing a blind spot, your mirrors are set incorrectly.

-- It's hard to say exactly how often you should check your mirrors, but probably something like **once every 10 - 15 seconds** is a reasonable start. Most people drive for a minute or more without ever looking in their mirrors. Many racers only check their mirrors two or three times a lap, which is way too infrequently.

-- Get in the habit of **checking your side mirror every time you turn the steering wheel** -- prior to turning the wheel. If you're setting up for a right turn, you should glance in your right-side mirror while braking for the turn -- every time! I know it seems silly to check your right-side mirror at a city intersection before turning right, but it's a good way to develop the habit so it becomes automatic when you're on the race track. Obviously, on the highway, you should (and probably already do) check your side mirror before changing lanes. But try extending that habit to all turns, getting off an exit ramp, turning at an intersection, turning into your driveway, everywhere you make a turn. Eventually your brain will be imprinted with the habit check mirror before turning wheel.

-- Another useful trigger is the brake. **Every time you touch the brake, check your mirrors.** This is a useful habit to have for racing, because many passes occur under braking.

-- When you're learning a new track or analyzing an existing track, take some time to think about potential **passing zones**. And then train yourself to check your mirrors every time, every lap, when entering those zones. Typically, they are the braking zones at the end of any significant straight. Don't

just check your mirrors two or three times a lap on the straights. Analyze the track and think about where you are likely to be passed, and train yourself to check your mirrors at those points also.

-- Some of the worst places on racetracks are on "**wandering straights**": places like No-Name Straight at Lime Rock, or between T3 and T4 at Summit Point, or the back straight at BeaveRun. These are places where the track curves slightly, but not enough to be considered a real turn. Virtually any "racing line" will work along these straights, so it is hard to predict where oilier drivers might go. We see a lot of contact incidents in these areas because the slower driver is not expecting to be passed, is not watching his mirrors, and is pursuing a different line than the overtaking driver might expect. So these are "hot spots" where you should be definitely checking your mirrors, every lap.

Sorry if this sounds a bit preachy, yeah I know -- you're all experts and already know how to use a stupid mirror ... but still, we have had too many incidents and near-incidents lately, as a result of lack of awareness. And this is one of the very few things you can work on in the off-season to improve your driving ability. Please consider it as you're tooling down the highway this winter.

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